

MEMORANDUM

To: Board of Regents
From: Board Office
Subject: Programmatic Re-Accreditation Report at the University of Iowa
Date: May 12, 2003

Recommended Action: Receive the BA/MSW Combined Programs, School of Social Work, accreditation report from the University of Iowa.

Link to Strategic Plan: This report addresses the following Key Result Areas (KRAs) in the Board's Strategic Plan:

KRA 1.0.0.0 Become the best public education enterprise in the United States.

Action Step 1.1.3.2 Report data in the relevant governance reports and presentations to the Board.

KRA 4.0.0.0 Meet the objectives of the Board and institutional strategic plans and provide effective stewardship of the institutions' state, federal, and private resources.

Executive Summary: Typically, program accreditation includes a self-study prepared by the department to address the criteria defined by its accrediting agency; an on-site visit by peer (discipline) evaluators; a report prepared by the on-site visiting team that identifies strengths and areas of improvement; a letter from the accrediting agency to the institution regarding the accreditation/re-accreditation status of the program and the need for future action; and a response from the institution, if necessary. This program has complied with all of the requirements for re-accreditation, including responding to the recommendations identified during the on-site visit.

Program Description – BASW The Bachelor's Degree in Social Work (BASW) prepares students for entry into professional social work practice as generalists. The program prepares students for employment in public and private social services in home and community-based settings; prepares students for informed community participation in social welfare issues; and provides a base for graduate study in social work or allied professions.

Program
Description – MSW

The Master of Social Work (MSW) program prepares social workers for leadership in the profession and for advanced social work practice in one of two concentrations – family-centered practice or integrated practice. The program's goals are to enable students to understand the dynamics of human development and change; to learn how to enhance the responsiveness of human service between society and the individual; and to acquire intervention skills for working with individuals, families, small groups, organizations, and communities in public and private agencies and institutions.

Accrediting
Agency

The combined programs are accredited by the Commission on Accreditation (COA) of the Council on Social Work Education. At its November 2002 meeting, the COA reaccredited the combined degree programs for the maximum eight-year cycle ending October 2010. A progress report must be submitted by the University by August 1, 2003.

Strengths

Selected
Strengths

The following strengths were identified in the visiting team report:

- ▣ The program has a very good reputation throughout the state, region, nation, including some international connections.
 - ▣ The faculty, including clinical and adjunct faculty, are well qualified.
 - ▣ There is a well-developed curriculum for both programs with a strong cultural competence content.
 - ▣ There are strong advisory boards in on-campus and off-campus locations.
 - ▣ The program provides immersion travel experiences for students.
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Areas for Improvement

Item #1 *While there is adequacy in numbers of faculty (FTE) in the School, there is a problem in providing sufficient continuity of ongoing faculty in the BASW Program.*

Institutional Response The School has used two strategies to strengthen faculty resources in the BASW Program – hiring new faculty and re-assigning current faculty to the program. Since 1996, the School has hired 9.75 FTE new faculty, including three faculty members who will begin in AY 2002-03. Some of the new faculty will have regular assignments in the BASW program, while others will be assigned graduate-level courses, permitting the re-assignment of more seasoned faculty to the BASW program.

Item #2 *There is an absence of cultural diversity (faculty of color) in the tenure-track faculty.*

Institutional Response Subsequent to the preparation of the self-study and the site team visit, the School hired an additional faculty member of color in a tenure-track position. The new hire resulted from a minority post-doctoral and mentoring program implemented by the School. The School has made other unsuccessful attempts to hire faculty of color. However, while seeking to increase racial/ethnic and other diversity of regular faculty, visiting and adjunct faculty have helped to diversify the teaching staff.

Item #3 *There is absence of diversity (students of color) in the School. This concern was expressed by students, and community advisory council members.*

Institutional Response - BASW The School's Diversity Committee identified the following issues to improve recruitment and retention of students of color for the BASW program:

- ☐ Need to improve the pre-social work advising process to recruit students into the program.
 - ☐ Recruitment should occur through community colleges where many students of color begin their college studies.
 - ☐ Careers in social work should be emphasized in high school so that prospective students of color are aware of the profession.
 - ☐ Increased scholarships should be provided to recruit and retain students of color.
 - ☐ New brochures should be developed as a marketing tool to recruit students of color and males into the program.
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Institutional
Response – MSW

The plan for increasing the number of students of color in the MSW program will build on the plan for increasing diversity in the BASW program. The School has also developed a recruitment plan to increase the number of students of color in the MSW program, which includes:

- ▣ Increasing scholarships and financial aid to graduate students of color;
- ▣ Emphasizing information about the strong job market for social workers with the MSW degree;
- ▣ Building relationships with colleges and universities in Iowa who educate students of color;
- ▣ Continuing to provide support and assistance to students of color who apply to the MSW program;
- ▣ Improving program accessibility for working students, single parents, and students with limited financial resources;
- ▣ Emphasizing new and innovative programs offered by the School of Social Work; and
- ▣ Reviewing admissions procedures to ensure that the process does not discriminate against applicants of color.

In Fall 2002, 14 students (9.5%) of the entering MSW class were students of color or international students.

Item #4

While there is a use of syllabi templates, course outlines varied considerably between sections of the same course, and between on-campus and off-campus sites.

Institutional
Response

Currently, all required undergraduate and graduate courses use recently revised and approved master syllabi that contain the course description, goals, and academic outcomes for each course and recommend appropriate texts and readings.

There remain some differences in assigned readings, assignments, and the schedule of topics covered from section to section. The Curriculum Committee plans to oversee future revisions to ensure consistency between sections of the same course.

Review of the syllabi for the elective courses was not complete at the time of the visit, perhaps giving the impression that there was less consistency among course outlines than is the case. Twenty-four of the forty-two elective syllabi have been revised. Eighteen are being revised and updated; the changes will be included in all course outlines by Fall 2003.

Item #5

Student advising received low ratings in outcome data. During the site team visit students expressed concern about the quality and consistency in advising.

Institutional
Response - BASW

While data from the most recent survey show improved responses to the advising system, the data also revealed a lack of knowledge by students of special support services offered by the School and lack of referral information about other resources at the University. Special attention will be given to these issues in the coming year. Other steps will also be taken to improve the advising process:

- (1) Enhanced training of undergraduate advisors in undergraduate program requirements;
 - (2) Re-deployment of advisors who prefer not to advise undergraduates;
 - (3) Enhanced outreach to transfer students who are considering applying to the BASW program;
 - (4) Enhanced orientation of pre-social work students about the competitive admissions process; and
 - (5) Implementation of a new advising contact form that maintains a record of past decisions/actions.
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Institutional
Response – MSW

As a result of enhanced efforts by the School to respond to MSW students' concern about the quality of their academic advising, there has been some improvement in student satisfaction with the advising system. However, additional steps are planned to improve the advising process and students' lack of knowledge of special support services offered by the School and lack of referral information about other resources at the University:

- (1) Continued training of master's program advisors in effective methods of advising;
 - (2) Training of advisors in ways to individualize the program according to students' interests and needs, including information on practicum placement opportunities, electives, fields of study, dual degree programs, referral resources, and career options for MSW graduates;
 - (3) Enhanced orientation to the master's program for incoming students; and
 - (4) Adaptation of the current individualized advising planning form used in the MSW program for advisors to maintain a record of past decisions/actions.
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Item #6 *The structure of the MSW field practicum in the concentration year can make it difficult for working students. This concern was expressed by some “non-traditional” students who found it extremely difficult to complete the concentration year.*

Institutional Response Balancing work and family obligations with the demands of the MSW program, and the practicum in particular, has been a long-standing issue. However, the School is committed to developing alternatives that enhance students’ learning and the quality of their experience, while acknowledging the reality of their employment needs. Therefore, the director of field education is researching advanced year practicum designs that other MSW programs use to accommodate the needs of “non-traditional” students. The Curriculum Committee will review these designs and other options for the advanced practicum.

Item #7 *Students (on-campus) expressed concern about the loss of the School’s computer lab. It was difficult to obtain the necessary computing support in other locations.*

Institutional Response After the closure of the School’s lab, social work classes requiring a computer lab were held in an Instructional Technology Center (ITC) across the street from the School. To facilitate student access to computing services, the School will provide written material with the locations and hours of ITCs and tours of the two ITCs that are within one block of the School during student orientations.

Item #8 *Students (off-campus) expressed concern about paying for certain campus fees for activities and services when they are on-campus only for a limited time (i.e., taking one course).*

Institutional Response The School will review the University’s policy of assessing student activity fees to all students to determine if the policy might be changed for students who are taking a limited number of classes on campus. If no change is made, the School will provide a written explanation of the financial implications of taking a course on campus to the students enrolled off-campus.

Item #9 *BASW students expressed concern about the difficulty in taking elective courses due to scheduling.*

Institutional Response The School may need to do a better job of promoting electives among sophomores and juniors as pre-social work majors because the required course demands of senior year will not allow time for electives if students are not admitted into the program as juniors. Current efforts attempt to ensure that as many qualified sophomores as possible are admitted into the program as juniors so that they have two years in which to complete the major. This provides more flexibility in taking electives and gives students more time to be socialized into the profession of social work.

Item #10 *Students in the Sioux City off-campus program expressed concern about lacking opportunity to learn technology skills.*

Institutional Response Competence in basic word processing is a prerequisite for admission to the program and is stated in the admissions materials. The concern of Sioux City students has resulted in an assessment of the skills taught in the course and the sequencing of this course. The computer lab will now be scheduled in the first semester of a student's program of study in Sioux City. Students will also be informed of other computer-related courses offered in the Sioux City area. In addition, the SUI distance education librarian will meet with Sioux City students at least twice during their first year to demonstrate how to access library resources from the University's libraries.

Item #11 *Class sizes in some practice courses were large.*

Institutional Response Although the Fundamentals of Social Work Practice course for undergraduates has an enrollment of 45 students, the Interpersonal Skills Laboratory, where students practice their skills through role-playing and videotaping, has a maximum of 12 students per section. The Field Experience Seminar is limited to 12-14 students so that students have the opportunity to process their experiences. The Introduction to Social Work Research undergraduate course has been limited to 22-23 students per section because of the amount of interaction involving student research projects that the course requires. When course enrollments exceed 30 students, a teaching assistant is assigned to assist the instructor and provide additional instructional support to students.

Copy of
Materials

A complete copy of the materials on this accreditation report, including the self-study, on-site visiting team report, institutional response, and letter of formal notification of accreditation, is on file in the Board Office.


Diana Gonzalez

Approved: 
Gregory S. Nichols